

The world according to Trump: the new US administration's foreign policy vision

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On 20 January, Donald Trump was sworn in as the 67th president of the United States. In the weeks preceding his inauguration, he issued a series of controversial statements indicating a desire to assume control of Greenland, the Panama Canal, and Canada, without ruling out the use of force. Elon Musk, a close ally of the president, reinforced his message on X , while also criticising the ruling Labour Party and the British Prime Minister. Furthermore, he openly expressed support for the far-right AfD party ahead of the upcoming Bundestag elections.

The new US president frequently invokes political realism but combines it with elements of expansionist policy. He is also attempting to apply business practices to international relations. While Musk's international activity may stem from different motives and objectives, it to some extent aligns with Trump's approach.

Political realism and American power in Trump's policy

Trump's approach to foreign policy is based on the assumption that the US global position is declining because its leadership allowed the country to be exploited in recent decades – both by partners and allies as well as by adversaries. Economically, globalisation has led to the relocation of numerous industrial plants outside the United States, adversely impacting American workers. In terms of security, Trump has repeatedly criticised allies who, for years, invested minimally in their own defence while benefiting from US protection, thereby enabling them to allocate greater resources to developing welfare states. He has also been critical of American 'interventionism,' which, in his view, led to two 'endless' wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Because Trump has opposed the traditional US policy of maintaining the liberal international order, he is often labelled an isolationist. In reality, however, his foreign policy statements and actions suggest a somewhat different set of underlying assumptions.

Like many critics of the United States' current global engagement, the president invokes the concept of realism in foreign policy. Proponents of this approach believe that the US should prioritise its own interests and security above all else. They challenge the idea of an international order based on values and institutions and argue that the world's great powers will inevitably seek to establish their own spheres of influence. A reference to realism was already present in the *National Security Strategy* signed by Trump in 2017, and this proposed shift in US foreign policy was encapsulated in the slogan 'America First.' The people who form Trump's intellectual backbone also draw from realism (see '[The architects of 'America](#)

First' and the potential consequences of a Trump victory for European security'. Trump's acknowledgment and regard for Russia's opposition to Ukraine's accession to NATO can be interpreted as a reflection of this approach by the president himself.

Anti-interventionism is another key element of Trump's foreign policy thinking. He has often portrayed himself as a peace-oriented president – one who ends wars rather than starts them. During his first term, he sought to withdraw US troops from overseas operations, initiating this process in Afghanistan. When confronting adversaries, he prefers economic measures such as tariffs, sanctions, and technological wars, as exemplified by his policy towards China. However, this does not mean reducing the role of the US Armed Forces. On the contrary, between 2017 and 2021, Trump repeatedly invoked the concept of *peace through strength*, which assumes that military power is the best guarantee of peace as it deters hostile states from taking action against the United States.

Trump's rhetoric is also characterised by nostalgia for the past and a desire to "make America great again." In foreign policy, this translates into a wish to revive the expansionist approach pursued by the United States at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. This perspective includes acquiring territory from other states as a means of expanding US land holdings. The United States followed such a policy in the past, purchasing Louisiana from France (1803), Alaska from Russia (1867) and part of present-day Arizona and New Mexico from Mexico (1854). The ideological foundation of US westward expansion was the *Manifest Destiny* doctrine, formulated in the mid-19th century, which framed territorial growth as the United States' "obvious destiny." Drawing upon this tradition in US policy could also serve Trump as a means for mobilising domestic public opinion, which has, for years, been exposed to a narrative of America's declining global standing.

Business culture in diplomacy and distrust of institutions

The new president's business background may have a strong impact on his political decisions, shaping his transactional approach to relations with other states. In Trump's view, the United States should secure more favourable trade agreements than in the past, as reflected in the renegotiation of NAFTA during his first term. He also believes that military assistance to partners and allies should neither be unconditional nor automatic. His business-oriented mindset similarly shapes his negotiating style, wherein an initially radical proposal typically serves as a starting point for discussions rather than an ultimate goal. This perspective helps explain his interest in purchasing Greenland, taking control of the Panama Canal, or threats to impose tariffs on specific countries.

Trump's first term revealed his distrust of international institutions, multilateral agreements, and global organisations, as well as his preference for bilateral relations. This aligns with his strong belief in his own effectiveness when dealing with other world leaders. Between 2017 and 2021, this approach led to two meetings with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. Currently, Trump is hinting at a potential bilateral meeting with Vladimir Putin or a visit to China.

Accounts from Trump's former associates suggest that he has limited knowledge of international relations. Before assuming the presidency in 2017, he had never held a position related to diplomacy. Assessing his true intentions in foreign policy is further complicated by his distinctive communication style – his statements are often exaggerated

and deliberately provocative. Furthermore, Trump believes that unpredictability works to his advantage, as it makes it harder for opponents to discern his intentions. A similar strategy was employed by Richard Nixon and became known as the 'madman theory'.

The role of Elon Musk in Trump's foreign policy

The true extent of Musk's influence on US policy remains one of the greatest uncertainties surrounding the incoming administration. The businessman supported Trump during the election campaign, providing both financial and personal contributions. Since the election, he has repeatedly signalled his close ties with the new president. In response, Trump announced that Musk, along with politician and businessman Vivek Ramaswamy, would head the Department of Government Efficiency. This entity does not currently exist, and it remains unclear whether it will be established within the administration. Musk has already exerted influence over appointments in the new administration, as well as Trump's political decisions, including his opposition to the compromise budget stopgap negotiated in the House of Representatives. Moreover, he has the ability to shape US public opinion through X, where he is both the owner and the platform's most prominent user. It therefore seems likely that he will also have an impact on US foreign policy by directly advising the president. Musk may further involve himself in diplomatic affairs, as demonstrated by his participation in a phone call with President Volodymyr Zelensky and his meeting with China's vice president, which was also attended by US Vice President J.D. Vance.

Meanwhile, Musk's involvement in Europe may be an attempt to replicate the success he achieved in the United States by providing financial and media support to politically aligned forces. If the radical groups he backs succeed, his influence over developments in individual countries and within the European Union would grow. This would also allow him to shape national and EU regulations affecting his businesses.

Cooperation with Musk on European policy could prove a major asset for the Trump administration. If the billionaire remains one of Trump's closest allies without holding an official position, he will enjoy greater freedom of action, enabling him to influence European public opinion in ways that are beyond the reach of US diplomacy. By promoting and supporting political forces aligned with the president, he could gradually contribute to the emergence of pro-Trump governments. This, in turn, would weaken the European Union and facilitate the US president's efforts to develop bilateral relations with its individual member states.